Turning the plastic tide
How can we stop polluting our oceans?

Fair trader
Rupa Ganguli and how to spot ethical fashion

Home bass
What Kaiser Chief Simon has been doing in lockdown

Issue No. 22
2021

LEEDS

The magazine for alumni of the University of Leeds

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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From the Editor

The new academic year at Leeds started like no other.

The University, and our community, like so much else, had to adapt to the many challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Things have been different for all of us, to put it mildly.

At the same time, life at Leeds goes on: there are plenty of stories to tell of our research, life on campus and the work of our alumni. Many of these stories reflect the adaptability, ingenuity and creativity that was always a hallmark of Leeds, but more necessary than ever in 2020.

Within these pages are entrepreneurs, scientists, rock stars and many others from across our worldwide alumni community. You will meet our 13th Vice-Chancellor, Professor Simone Buitendijk, who shares her impressions and priorities, and we will show how Leeds research continues to make our world a better place.

Phil

Phil Steel (English Language and Literature 1997)
Head of Alumni Engagement

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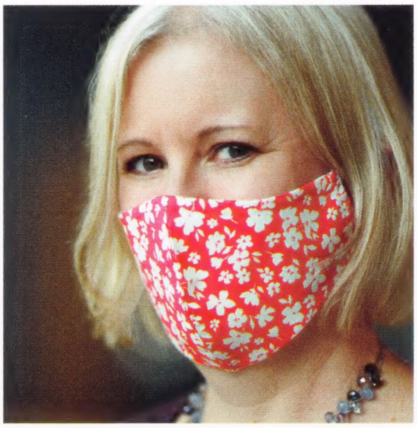

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Cover photo: Drone shot of the Parkinson Building at night by Steve Fleetwood

Email us at **alumni@leeds.ac.uk**, look for **@leedsalumni** online.

From our Vice-Chancellor

WORKING TOGETHER

The University's 13th Vice-Chancellor, Professor Simone Buitendijk, has an ambition to see Leeds enhance its global impact.

"Universities are important change-makers; I believe we are the only networked institutions that can truly solve global challenges," said our Vice-Chancellor. "Our alumni have a big role to play in this mission, as our ambassadors in the UK and around the world."

In September, Simone Buitendijk became the first female Vice-Chancellor in the University's history, joining Leeds following four years as Vice-Provost (Education) and Professor of Maternal and Child Health at Imperial College London. She previously held a senior leadership role as Vice-Rector at Leiden University in the Netherlands, with responsibility for education, student affairs and diversity.

"I couldn't turn down the opportunity to come to Leeds. It is research intensive and comprehensive, which I like – and when I first visited, I could sense the pride people had in this great community. The sense of social responsibility, locally and globally, truly matches my values."

Simone's ambition is reflected in the University's upcoming new strategy, which has culture, community and impact at its core, with an emphasis on digital transformation. "Together, I want us to address important world problems. We will focus on cutting-edge research and training the next generation of global citizens, strengthening links between research and education. We must also look to become more collaborative and inclusive, both within the University and between universities globally.

"I really do want to change the world. I think the University is the best place to do that, and I think together we can make it happen."

She sees alumni playing an active role. "Our 270,000-strong alumni community helps to make us globally visible. "By sharing expertise and mentoring talented students, particularly those from different cultural backgrounds and outlooks, you are truly making a difference. Despite the pandemic, our sense of community between staff, students and alumni is stronger than it has ever been in the way we have come together. I am grateful for that and I can't wait to meet our alumni in person as soon as I'm able to do so.

"Starting this role during a crisis was a little different," Simone added, "but it is also an important time to reflect on the future and what we want it to be. One of my immediate actions has been to look at things we are doing now in a digital environment that work well, and how to keep or adapt them for beyond the crisis. Digital learning brings the world together. For our alumni, it gives even greater opportunity for learning and sharing in classrooms all over the world. Combining this with local and global research and collaboration opens up huge opportunities for students, for research and for the communities we serve. There is huge potential in digital transformation, which is truly exciting."

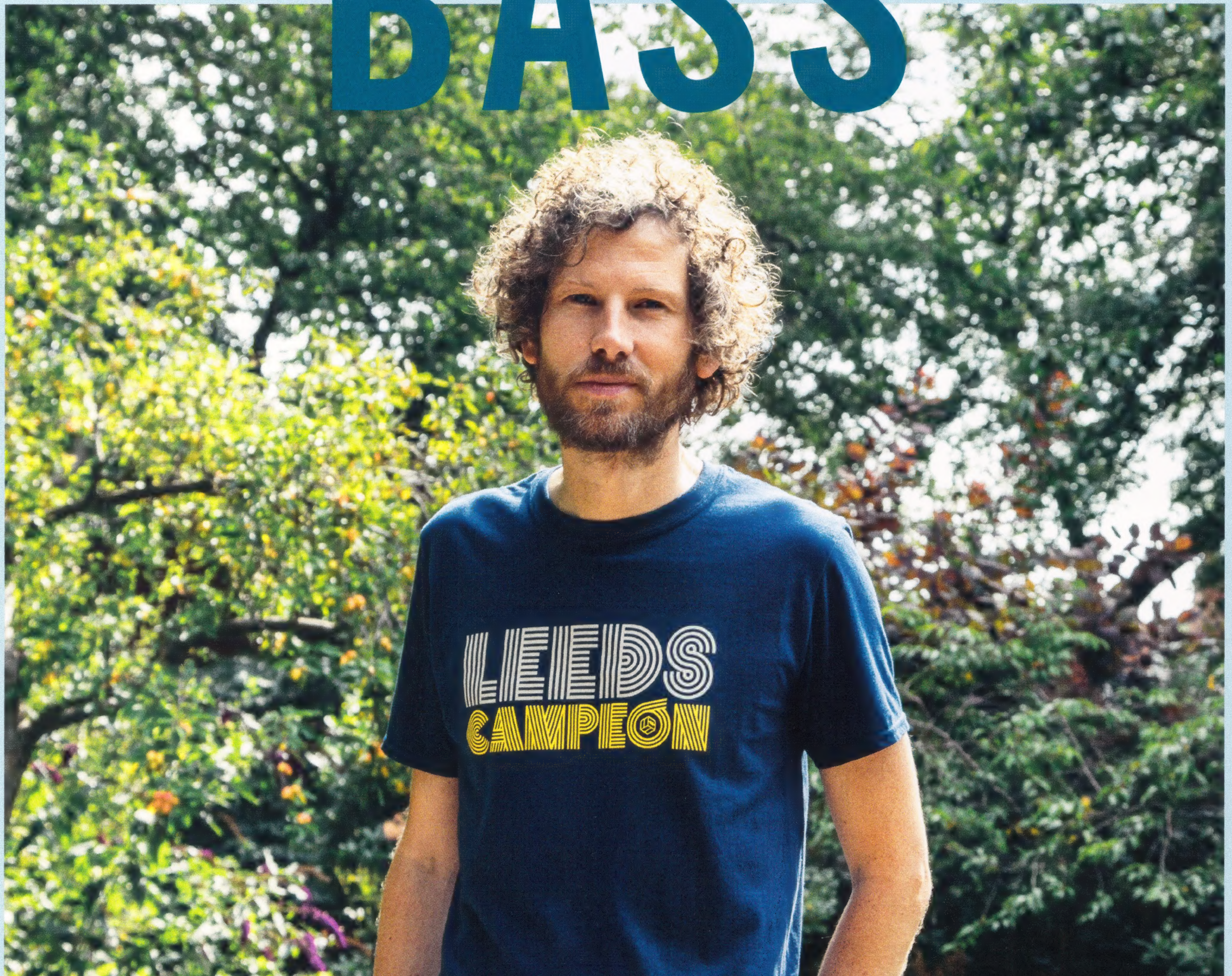
Since her arrival, Simone has been making the most of living in Leeds – whether cycling to campus from Headingley or exploring the surrounding countryside. "There is something about Yorkshire. I've been enjoying the nature and the trails. Every weekend I try to do a long walk following community recommendations on social media. When we're able to, I'm looking forward to exploring the city – the theatres, the museums – and meeting more of those who have been so welcoming."

Follow Simone on Twitter at **@SEBuitendijk** and read her blog at **simone-buitendijk.medium.com**

Alumni profile: Simon Rix, Kaiser Chiefs

The co-founder and bassist of indie giants Kaiser Chiefs on why he studied in his home town – and how he's still helping out in Leeds today.

HOME BASS



Credit: Lee Brown

Kaiser Chiefs bass player and Leeds United fan Simon Rix

Credit: Dani Beck

Kaiser Chiefs went from performing in small Leeds clubs to filling arenas

Words
Journalist *Andrew Harrison*
(Political Studies 1990)
produces the podcasts
Oh God, What Now?,
The Bunker and Bigmouth.

When Britain locked down in March last year, some threw themselves into walking. But, for the multimillion-selling Leeds band Kaiser Chiefs, a way to cheer up the nation dropped into their laps.

After radio DJ Chris Moyles played their modern standard 'Oh My God', a listener joked that they should amend the lyrics to "Oh my God, I can't believe it, I've never spent this much time at home." Challenge accepted, recalled bass player **Simon Rix** (Geography & Mathematics 2000).

"We all have recording kit at home so we could work on it really quickly," he explained. The Kaisers released a new version on YouTube to widespread approval, especially from NHS professionals. "It did what we wanted it to do, which was to cheer everyone up," said Simon. "A nice, funny thing in a miserable time."

Community involvement has become important to Simon, a Leeds native who grew up in Menston, went to Notre Dame Sixth Form College and then, like the band's drummer **Vijay Mistry** (Chemistry 2000), to the University itself. During lockdown he also helped local MP **Alex Sobel** (Information Systems 1997) to deliver PPE equipment across Leeds – "there was a real shortage during the summer so helping out was great" – and he and his partner assisted at a food bank at the Rainbow Junktion cafe near the Brudenell Social Club. "In all my years living in Headingley I wasn't aware how many people living close to me were having a really hard time financially," he said. "It was a real eye-opener."

The Leeds music scene was a huge part of Simon's choice to study at the University and the city is baked into his band's name. Originally, they were called Parva ("not a name you can get across in a noisy club") but success demanded something more memorable. "We sat in the pub thinking for weeks, months," said Simon. Then the name of a South African football team, the first club of Leeds United captain Lucas Radebe, came up. "Kaiser Chiefs was exactly what we wanted," said Simon. "It was strong, and Lucas had the Leeds spirit of giving it all. I loved that link. It was fate."

Now, after 16 lean years, United are back in the Premier League. Lifelong fan Simon finds himself President of the Supporters' Trust, which assists good causes including a food bank and a campaign for a plaque at Elland Road for Albert Johanneson, the first Black player in an FA Cup final.

"Leeds fans used to be a bit infamous," Simon admitted, "but now we're channeling our energies into good things. We were starved of great football for years but our new manager Bielsa has a high moral compass. He wants to play football the right way, and that's rubbing off on the city."

Does Simon miss the fact that he can't do his two favourite things: watching Leeds in the top flight and playing live shows? "I'm quite enjoying being an armchair fan," he laughed. "We put up with terrible football for 16 years. I can wait a few more months."

Who else went to Leeds?
alumni.leeds.ac.uk/prominents

Live from Leeds

From post-punk to prog rock to alternative pop, the Leeds students who went on to rock the world

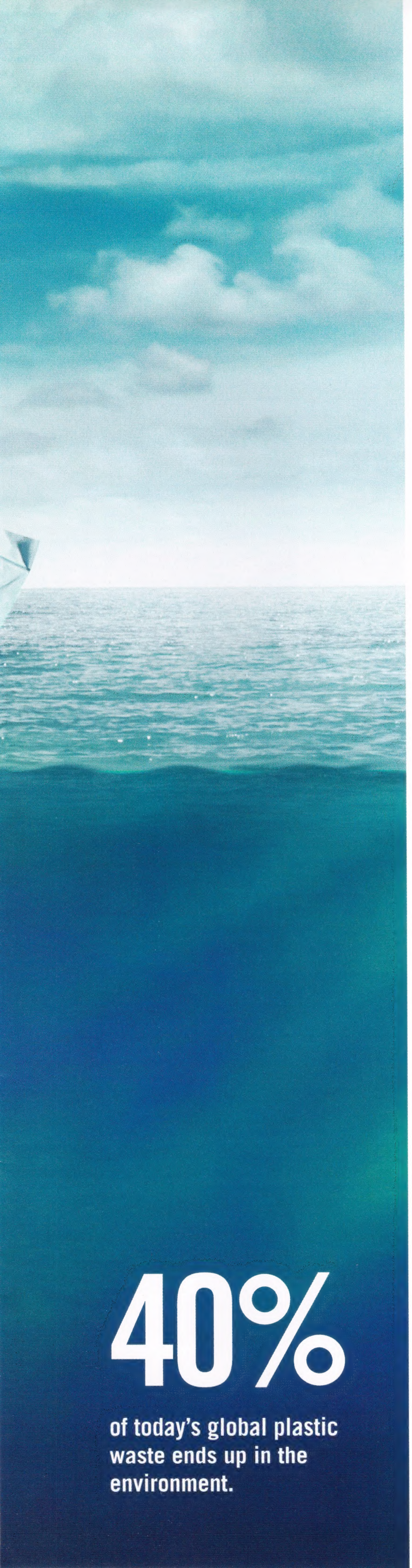
Gang of Four
Hugely influential post-punk from **Andy Gill** and **Jon King** (both Fine Art 1979) and **Hugo Burnham** (English 1978).
Credit: Adrian Boot

Mark Knopfler OBE
The master of evocative guitar and co-founder of Dire Straits graduated in English in 1973 and received an Honorary Doctor of Music in 1995.
Credit: © Angel Marchini/ZUMA Wire

Corinne Bailey Rae
The Grammy winning singer-songwriter of 'Put Your Records On' fame received an English degree in 2000 and an Honorary Doctor of Music in 2011.
Credit: © Nancy Kaszerman/ZUMA Wire

alt-J
The acclaimed abstract indie band met when **Joe Newman**, **Thom Green**, **Gus Unger-Hamilton** and original member **Gwil Sainsbury** studied English and Fine Art in 2007.
Credit: Rachel Torres/Alamy

TURNING THE PLASTIC TIDE



Our oceans are choking on plastic, but researchers in Civil Engineering are determined to change this in a generation.

The images are horribly familiar – turtles enmeshed in polythene bags, whales choked by shoals of plastic waste, a beautiful ocean wilderness blanketed in the jetsam of the developed world. Dr Costas Velis, Lecturer in Resource Efficiency Systems, and his research team have been instrumental in crunching the numbers behind the story of plastic pollution, recently brought to global attention by Sir David Attenborough.

They project that, without urgent action, between 2016 and 2040 almost 1.4 billion tonnes of plastic will end up dumped on land and in watercourses. Another 2 billion tonnes will be burned in the open, releasing toxic fumes and greenhouse gases.

Costas first became aware of the issue as a teenager: "I grew up in a small fishing town in Greece, surrounded by the sea and a vast complex of lagoons – a protected bird habitat of international importance. Yet, the local authority would dispose of waste into the wetland, or set it on fire on a nasty dump site. When the wind blew in the wrong direction you could smell it across the whole town.

"It was a total paradox," said Costas. "This is a place which had preserved its ways of life, its fishing and agriculture, for centuries – and yet at the same time was doing enormous damage to the environment. When you see this going on, in some of the most beautiful places of the global south, like the Brazilian rainforest, in informal settlements in Kenya and Indonesia close to stunning natural reserves, it's deeply unsettling."

A computer model co-developed by Costas, Ed Cook, Research Fellow in Circular Economy Systems for Waste Plastics, and a group of expert colleagues worldwide has tracked the flow of plastic across the globe and revealed systems overwhelmed by the sheer volume of plastic waste.

A key issue is the amount that simply isn't collected – around two billion people worldwide have no formal waste collection. "We take rubbish collection for granted," he said, "but what can you do if no one comes to take it away? People throw it in the street, in a creek, in the sea, or just set it on fire. What choice do they have? The rivers themselves become polluted environments, transporting waste to other people downstream and on into the oceans."

There are further consequences. "As drainage channels become overwhelmed by discarded waste, their effectiveness is also disrupted, causing flooding. We also know that these plastics are breaking down and just one single object can become millions of fragments. It's shocking to think that microplastics are already everywhere – in the air, in the soil, in our food and our drinks. Whilst the jury's still out on the implications for human health, the facts are massively alarming: we need to stop it, and do so at source, before it breaks down, enters the environment and is dispersed all over."

The impact goes beyond the natural environment. "We worked to model plastic pollution for Bali, one of the world's major tourist destinations, which relies heavily on its pristine environment for visitors. Plastics on the beaches and in the sea have major economic implications for the island."

Dr Costas Velis

40%

of today's global plastic waste ends up in the environment.

Any intervention begins with taking individual responsibility for what we use and how we consume it – whether that's taking a reusable water bottle to the gym or separating waste so it can be efficiently recycled. However, Costas warned: "These alone aren't going to solve the problem."

Rather, the joint report Breaking the Plastic Wave (see graphic below) asserts that the issue can only be tackled with concerted, joined-up and sustained intervention by government, industry and society worldwide. The report's System Change scenario sets out a series of complementary interventions to reduce plastic pollution by 80 per cent over the next 20 years: "There are pathways we can take to bring this under control within a generation," he said.

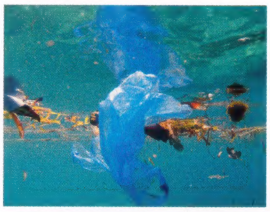
Reducing plastic consumption is an obvious first step, but while government initiatives around the world have focused on bottles and shopping bags, the report depicts a more complex picture. Vast populations of the urban poor, notably in Africa and South East Asia, have no option but to consume food and products such as shampoos in tiny, highly polluting, sachets and films. Moving away from such packaging could have a much greater impact. Similarly, the report suggests that some plastic products can be safely and economically replaced by paper and compostable materials.

But where plastic remains the only viable option for a product, more must be recycled or, failing that, recovered as fuel. Currently only small amounts of plastic can be practically recycled – switching to those that can be economically reprocessed, while improving labelling so that used products can be better sorted for recycling, could massively reduce the amount that ends up as waste.

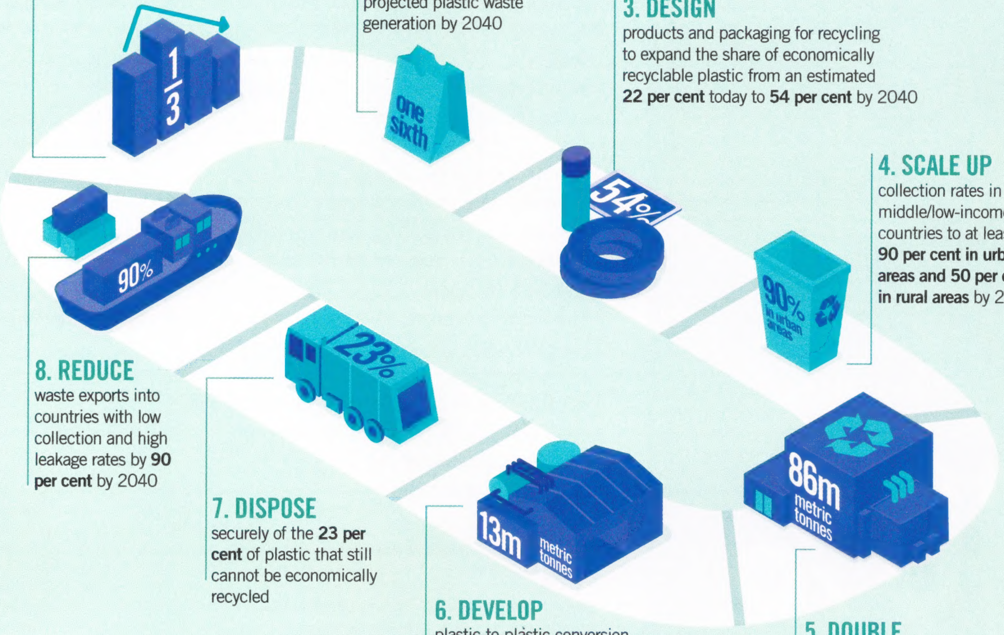
The team's modelling shows the effectiveness of these interventions: every extra tonne of plastic collected would prevent 180 kilograms of waste reaching the aquatic environment. So investing in waste collection, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, would both address the issue of waste reaching the oceans and improve the lives of some of the most disadvantaged people on Earth. Increasing the tiny amount of development aid that goes to the waste and resources management sector is critical to this change.

> **"We need to develop a circular economy where today's plastic waste becomes tomorrow's resource."**

11 **million tonnes of plastic leaked into the oceans in 2016**



Breaking the Plastic Wave



1. REDUCE
growth in plastic consumption to avoid nearly **one-third** of projected plastic waste generation by 2040

2. SUBSTITUTE
plastic with paper and compostable materials, switching **one-sixth** of projected plastic waste generation by 2040

3. DESIGN
products and packaging for recycling to expand the share of economically recyclable plastic from an estimated **22 per cent** today to **54 per cent** by 2040

4. SCALE UP
collection rates in middle/low-income countries to at least **90 per cent in urban areas and 50 per cent in rural areas** by 2040

5. DOUBLE
mechanical recycling capacity globally to **86 million metric tonnes per year** by 2040

6. DEVELOP
plastic-to-plastic conversion potentially to a global capacity of up to **13 million metric tonnes** per year

7. DISPOSE
securely of the **23 per cent** of plastic that still cannot be economically recycled

8. REDUCE
waste exports into countries with low collection and high leakage rates by **90 per cent** by 2040

Working alongside colleagues from global innovation group SYSTEMIQ, the University of Oxford, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation – established by the record-breaking yachtswoman – and campaign group Common Seas, Costas Velis has produced the report Breaking the Plastic Wave. Published by the Pew Charitable Trusts, this scientific inquiry offers the first comprehensive insight into the amount of plastic being dumped in global ecosystems.

Scholar examines Nile settlers' waste

A scholarship funded by alumni enabled Mohamed Kamal to study on the University's renowned MSc in Water, Sanitation and Health, while a travel bursary supported his fieldwork examining plastic waste in Egypt.

Through questionnaires and interviews with residents and local waste professionals, and examinations of the types of waste and its disposal, Mohamed unveiled a series of key issues around solid waste in the region.

After graduating with a Distinction – and the highest marks in his cohort – Mohamed spent two months volunteering on a project to clean areas of the Nile before taking up a post at Nahda University in Egypt to work on waste management research. "I truly cannot put into words how big a role this scholarship has played in helping me be where I am today," he said. "My promise is to never forget the privilege I have had through my education and to make the most of every opportunity."

Mohamed Kamal (BEng Civil Engineering with Project Management 2018; MSc Water, Sanitation and Health Engineering 2019) examined the level of plastic waste flowing into the Nile from an informal settlement close to Cairo.

"At the same time, we can empower the waste pickers to help us solve this global challenge," said Costas. "Across the global south millions of marginalised people work on dump sites and search in bins to salvage recyclable items. Like the old rag-and-bone men, they pick things which have value – perhaps a PET water bottle or a PP yoghurt pot – and sell them to someone else who trades them further down the chain. By doing so they are actually preventing plastic from becoming pollution. They are unsung heroes, responsible for the greatest proportion of plastic recycling worldwide.

"Theirs is an unimaginably hard life, yet they're bringing plastics back into the economy in places where state waste collection for recycling doesn't exist. By recognising their role, formalising their employment and improving their conditions, we can support them to prevent plastic pollution."

We still need to rapidly increase the amount of plastic waste that is mechanically recycled, a figure currently running at around 15 per cent. Allied to improved collection and sorting systems, investment in new recycling plants around the world could increase that figure dramatically, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and generate revenue as recycled plastic is sold on for re-use. Innovation in chemical conversion can lift this figure still further, increasing the range of low-grade, heavily-contaminated plastic which can be converted into new materials.

Yet even with these measures in place, the report concedes that investment will also be needed to create engineered and controlled landfill sites to house the vast volumes of plastic that still cannot be recycled or reused. Coupled with this is the need to reduce the 3.5 million tonnes of plastic that high-income countries export annually to middle- and low-income countries where there is a greater risk of it being openly burned or illegally dumped.

Recent media coverage has propelled this into public consciousness. "There's been a fantastic wave of awareness," said Costas. "And because we're all aware of the plastics we use and discard, the damage we're causing is much easier for people to understand than carbon dioxide, which is invisible.

"But awareness is only one part of it. This is an issue which demands system-wide approaches." Beyond academia, Costas works with international forums and organisations, leading the Task Force on Marine Litter of the International Solid Waste Association. He has also backed demands from the WWF and Ellen MacArthur Foundation for a binding UN treaty to slash the amount of plastic waste reaching the environment.

"The work we have released shows – in the strongest possible way – that we are facing a major global challenge. We can't hide from this, we can't ignore it. It is so serious that we need concerted and immediate action," he said. "Without it the problem will keep escalating at a worrying pace. This should by no means divert our attention from solving other established global challenges, such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity. But it needs adding to that list."

Will that problem be solved? "I believe in human ingenuity and that through our ingenuity we can solve the problems we've created," Costas said. "I think here of the fight against ozone-depleting substances, where we seem to be winning! But this requires everybody – the innovators, companies, governments, academics, practitioners and people who fund development aid – to work together.

"I am inherently optimistic," he said. "But my optimism is cautious, because the change we need to see on the ground is substantial."

Plastic free pledge

The University and Leeds University Union (LUU) pledge to become free of single-use plastic by 2023.

With catering and office spaces already being single-use plastic free since last year, support is now being given for lab space and other services to develop alternatives to disposable plastic equipment over the next two years.

"This is a huge commitment and a big challenge for us," said **Dr Louise Ellis** (PhD Earth and Environment 2008), Director of Sustainability. "But we are determined to play our part by acting together to reduce our plastic footprint.

"We've already made so much progress, through strong recycling rates and catering initiatives such as our reusable cups. We hope this pledge inspires all staff and students to contribute towards reducing our use of throwaway plastics across campus and beyond."

Chris Morris, Union Affairs Officer at LUU, added: "Students have often been ahead of the national agenda, with Freshers' Week being plastic bag free and ensuring we have biodegradable alternatives in the Union. We look forward to working in partnership with the University to make sure we all have a positive impact on this future-defining issue for the planet."

Dr Louise Ellis leads the University's sustainability drive.

Rupa Ganguli (MSc Textile Management 2001)

Credit: Marcus Lyon (Politics 1987)

> “
> A LOT COULD BE SOLVED IF WE AS CONSUMERS STARTED MAKING CHOICES THAT MEANT WE ACTUALLY LIVE AN ETHICAL LIFESTYLE.
> ”

FAIR TRADER

A passion for textiles born in the markets of Mumbai is helping one alum put the power back into the hands of the consumer.

Words
L'Oréal Blackett
(Broadcast Journalism 2010) is a freelance writer, presenter and former magazine editor from Manchester.

Rupa Ganguli (MSc Textile Management 2001) understands the complexities of launching a lifestyle business in line with your values – especially when it comes to sustainability. The international trade specialist helps connect artisans within an industry that often values production over people. As she said: "It should always be about the people."

Rupa traces her passion for textiles back to her teenage years. As a 17-year-old economics student "full of curiosity" she chanced upon a busy Mumbai wholesale market brimming with colourful fabric and "a lot of people who knew what they were doing". She managed to persuade a seller to help her purchase some leftover fabric, and with it she made her own outfit.

Rupa's ingenuity grew into a contemporary fashion business, first selling to her friends and then later to the wider community. Rupa doesn't recall India's retail sector being large at the time and her fledgling business caught the eye of the local press.

"I had to get a bank account, which was a big deal back then," said Rupa. Her entrepreneurship helped secure a postgraduate degree at India's premier school for fashion technology (NIFT, New Delhi) and she went on to gain a scholarship to study textiles at Leeds where she developed her interest in international trade. "It opened up a world of opportunity for me," said Rupa. "I could spend hours and hours in the textiles library."

Though her days in the Mumbai markets are behind her, she's grateful that the experience propelled a two-decade career in business and trade. Rupa's career spans working as a trade specialist within the United Nations' International Trade Centre in Geneva and the World Trade Organization.

With her global connections she founded the Inclusive Trade platform for artisans who enable positive change. By demystifying the supply chain, Rupa helps consumers make ethical choices by leading them straight to the source. "It's about transparency and visibility – people have lost that connection with the maker," said Rupa.

Whether the products are fashion, accessories, homeware, jewellery or even chocolates, Inclusive Trade makes it easier to share the stories of creators all over the world. "What's more, the majority of these wonderful products are made by women, or the process is led by women," she said.

Alongside supporting artisans, Rupa is passionate about encouraging consumers to buy responsibly. "We often say that the fashion industry isn't responsible enough, or that government regulations aren't strong enough in terms of ethical standards, or that the big brands and retailers push prices down," she said. "However, a lot of that could be solved if we as consumers started making choices that meant we actually live an ethical lifestyle. Making small and meaningful choices will go a long way."

SUSTAINABLE SHOPPING CHEAT-SHEET •
No.5

Rupa's sustainable shopping tips:

1) Price really is an indicator.
While not every £30 cotton T-shirt is sustainable, a £5 cotton T-shirt definitely isn't. Everyone in the supply chain should make a living wage. This costs the consumer more in the long run but the price is fair.

2) Beware 'designed in' labels.
There is a difference between a label that says where a garment is designed ('designed in') and where it is actually manufactured ('made in'). Not all manufacturers are transparent about how and where their items are made, and in Europe 'made in' labels are not mandatory.

3) Check for facts.
Just because it's made in the UK or the EU doesn't always mean it is ethical and safe. Look beyond marketing and check for facts.

4) Look for other certification.
Admittedly this is a minefield, yet look for certifications such as Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), OEKO-TEX, Global Recycle Standard (GRS) or Fairtrade.

5) If there's no background information, don't buy it.
There may be a reason why the manufacturer isn't telling you about the source.

It is not too late to watch
Rupa's Alumni Voices talk at
alumni.leeds.ac.uk/events-replay

Laszlo Lorand (PhD Biomolecular Structure 1951)

THE BIOCHEMIST WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD

When at Leeds, Laszlo Lorand made a seminal scientific discovery. But his success came at a heavy personal cost …

Trams in Leeds City Square 1949, perhaps carrying a student clutching precious research supplies to his chest.

Credit: The National Archives/SSPL/Getty Images

As a medical student, Laszlo Lorand saw a demonstration that left him amazed. He witnessed blood plasma turn from liquid into a solid clot within a matter of minutes, merely by the addition of a few drops of liquid containing the blood protein thrombin.

This rapid transformation had important life or death implications. While clot formation was essential for healing at sites of injury, if it occurred elsewhere in the body it could result in a fatal thrombosis, or circulatory blockage. Yet despite its physiological importance, how thrombin caused blood to clot remained a mystery, and it was one that Laszlo set out to solve.

In 1946, he joined the Institute of Biochemistry in Budapest, which was led by the Nobel laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi who was an inspirational figure to his staff and students. Szent-Györgyi gave them free tickets to concerts and operas and provided classes in English, which would later prove to be a lifeline for Laszlo.

Lunch in the Institute was followed by fiercely competitive games of volleyball, and regular table tennis matches provided a welcome break from the lab bench. Laszlo was enjoying life at the Institute, but when he received an invitation from the British scientist William Astbury to work with him at Leeds, the opportunity was too good to turn down.

Astbury had carried out pioneering work on the structural changes of blood proteins involved in clot formation, as well as early X-ray studies of DNA. Thanks to his internationally renowned reputation in using X-rays to study the shape of fibrous biological molecules, Astbury's lab at Leeds was once nicknamed the 'X-ray Vatican'.

Prof Laszlo Lorand, whose discoveries changed our understanding of blood clotting, in later life

The communist regime in Hungary, however, was far less enthusiastic about Laszlo's proposed visit to Leeds. As the Cold War began and former wartime allies now became adversaries, the authorities in eastern Europe did not look favourably on their young scientists travelling to the West. In the same year that Laszlo joined the Institute, Winston Churchill made his grim observation that "an iron curtain has descended across the continent". For Laszlo, that iron curtain was about to come crashing down with full force.

On the afternoon of Friday 17 December 1948, Laszlo was called to a meeting with his supervisor, the biochemist Bruno Straub – who later became the President of Hungary. If Laszlo thought this would be just another routine discussion about his progress in the lab, he could not have been more wrong.

The meeting began well enough with Straub praising Laszlo's work, but he then demanded that Laszlo give up his plans to travel to England. Straub informed Laszlo that his passport would be withdrawn by the authorities on the following Monday morning.

> "THE IDEA THAT A PROMISING YOUNG SCIENTIST COULD CHOOSE TO REMAIN IN THE WEST WAS AN UNACCEPTABLE LOSS OF FACE – AND ONE THAT THEY WERE NOT GOING TO ALLOW."

Having narrowly escaped deportation to Auschwitz where his father had been murdered, Laszlo refused to become the victim of yet another brutal totalitarian regime. That weekend he made a decision that would change his life – and probably broke his heart. On Sunday afternoon he boarded a train bound for Vienna, leaving his widowed mother and the woman he had hoped to marry behind him. He faced the arduous journey with only five pounds sterling in his pocket and, in his suitcase, a freshly roasted goose and a large stick of hard salami – packed by his mother, who feared that Britain was still suffering food shortages.

Once he was safely out of the Communist Bloc, Laszlo paid his way through the ruins of post-war Europe with cigarettes before arriving in London on Boxing Day to stay in what he described as "one of the less lovely hotels near the station".

On 2 January 1949, Laszlo finally arrived in Leeds where he found that Astbury's grand vision to establish a new department for molecular biology was starkly at odds with the reality of post-war Britain.

There was no hallowed chapel of science, replete with a state-of-the-art laboratory, here. Laszlo found himself working in a Victorian terrace (now demolished) opposite where the students' union stands today. It was a converted residential property, plagued with problems. The electricity supply was unreliable, the plumbing was prone to flooding and the floors were so uneven that they made delicate scientific instruments wobble.

It was under these spartan conditions that Laszlo began his research into how thrombin worked. His studies called for regular visits to either a local abattoir or the Red Cross, from which Laszlo would return, sitting on a tram with a bottle of blood clutched tightly to his chest to avoid spilling the precious material needed for his research.

But adverse working conditions were the least of Laszlo's concerns. Within a year of his arrival in Leeds, he received a letter from Straub instructing him to return to Hungary at once.

To the Communist authorities, the idea that such a promising young scientist as Laszlo could choose of his own volition to remain in the West was an unacceptable loss of face – and one that they were not going to allow.

Astbury was quick to come to Laszlo's defence and argued to both the University and Hungarian authorities on his behalf. He explained that Laszlo's work at Leeds was so important that he should be allowed to remain, writing: "As far as I can see, the only 'crime' that Lorand has committed is that he was rash enough to leave Hungary to work in this University and has therefore fallen under the bane of western influences. In these days, as you know, that can be sufficient to damn anyone from the eastern European countries, and it appears that it has indeed been sufficient to damn Lorand."

Although now stripped of his Hungarian citizenship, Laszlo was able to remain in Leeds thanks to Astbury's intervention. Like many alumni before and after him, he lived in Headingley at the Victorian manor Devonshire Hall – a far lovelier place than his hotel in London had been. The cachet of Laszlo's Astbury connection secured him a place at the dining room's high table, a formal setting that brought him not only better food, but also the chance to improve his English.

While at Leeds, Laszlo made the landmark discovery that thrombin acts as an enzyme to convert the soluble blood protein fibrinogen into insoluble fibrin, the active agent of clot formation.

Words
Dr Kersten Hall
(MA History and Philosophy of Science 2008) is a visiting fellow in the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science. He corresponded with Prof Laszlo Lorand in the last few years of his life.

Laszlo honed his English skills in Devonshire Hall's dining room.

Laszlo's discovery earned him a PhD and it was quickly recognised as fundamental to understanding the mechanism of blood clot formation.

After leaving Leeds to move to the Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine in London, Laszlo made a second major discovery with the isolation of Factor XIII, a blood component that is vital for clot stability and is involved in certain rare hereditary blood disorders. Shortly after, Laszlo moved to the US where he remained until his death in 2018.

He did, however, remain in touch with Astbury. As Soviet tanks rolled through the streets of Budapest during the invasion of Hungary in 1956, Astbury expressed his support for Laszlo and the family he had left behind. Astbury wrote: "We have often thought of you in relation to this horrible business in Budapest … we were very sorry to hear that your own family were unable to escape."

Laszlo and Astbury shared a love of music, which provided consolation to them in dark times.

> "
> 'I PLAYED AULD LANG SYNE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE AT MIDNIGHT,' WROTE LASZLO. 'NOBODY APPLAUDED, IN FACT, I SEEMED TO DAMPEN THE MERRIMENT.
> "

In Leeds, the two of them had often enjoyed playing violin duets together, although in a letter of 1957 Laszlo admitted to Astbury that his latest attempts to learn the piano had been far from successful. "I played Auld Lang Syne on New Year's Eve at midnight," wrote Laszlo. "Nobody applauded, in fact, I seemed to dampen the merriment."

Laszlo's work on clotting would come to be of particular personal significance to Astbury, who suffered from cardiovascular complications during the final years of his life.

Prof Monty Losowsky (Medicine 1955), a former dean of the Leeds School of Medicine, recalled an encounter with Astbury when he was a junior doctor. Astbury refused to allow him to administer an anticoagulant until Losowsky had first visited the medical library to read the latest papers on the molecular mechanism of clot formation. This was not mere obstinacy on Astbury's part, but rather he wanted Losowsky to grasp that the future of medicine lay in understanding physiological processes such as clot formation in molecular terms.

Two titans of molecular biology – graduation day 1952 for Laszlo Lorand, right, with Prof William Astbury

Thanks to Laszlo and his groundbreaking work on fibrinogen and thrombin, Losowsky was able to do just that. He took Astbury's lesson to heart and went on to play a key role in establishing St James's University Hospital in Leeds as a renowned centre of teaching and academic research.

Astbury's vision of molecular medicine, together with Laszlo's work on clotting, has left a lasting legacy at Leeds in the work of countless researchers such as Losowsky, Robert Ariens and **Prof Sir Alex Markham** (Hon DSc 2006).

With thrombosis emerging as a serious consequence of Covid-19 infection, Laszlo's research on clotting remains invaluable to medicine. His discoveries still hold tremendous significance 72 years after the young Hungarian scientist arrived at Leeds, having perforce left his family behind.

Soviet tanks on the streets of Budapest, where Laszlo's family remained, when revolution came to Hungary in 1956
Credit: FOTO:FORTEPAN / Nagy Gyula

Timeline

1945	1948	1951	1955	1956	1987
William Astbury urges the Vice-Chancellor "that Leeds should be bold and help to lead the way" with the establishment of the first national centre for molecular biology.	Laszlo defies the Communist authorities and flees his native Hungary, leaving behind his widowed mother and fiancée. He did not see his family again until 1963, and did not return to Hungary until 1996.	Laszlo is awarded a PhD for his landmark work on blood clotting. But when his work first appears in the journal Nature, academic politics forces him to share authorship with a team at another university.	Now living in the US, Laszlo joins Northwestern University where he remains for the rest of his career, after having first taught physiology and pharmacology at Wayne State University's School of Medicine.	Revolution breaks out in Hungary in protest against the Communist regime but is crushed by Soviet military force. Mass arrests follow. More than 200,000 Hungarians flee the new Soviet-backed government.	In recognition of his groundbreaking work on thrombin, discovery of Factor XIII and contributions to the field of molecular medicine, Laszlo is elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Images credit: Copyright © BBC

FAB-U-LOUS

LEEDS KEEPS DANCING

At the end of last year, the BBC's Strictly Come Dancing brought some much-needed sparkle to Saturday nights in the UK. Leeds alumni are no strangers to the Strictly ballroom ...

2020

Jamie Laing
(Theatre and Performance 2011)

2020 finalist Jamie was due to take part in 2019 but withdrew before the live shows after suffering an injury. He didn't waste his second opportunity, reaching the final with partner Karen Hauer.

Speaking to the BBC before the show started, Jamie said: "It's one of the shows that we all grew up with. Honestly, it makes my mum proud that I'm doing it ... I'm pretty damn competitive, I don't like losing at anything, and especially something I fell out of last year. I'm going for the win!"

Nicola Adams (Honorary LLB 2015)

Olympic champion boxer Nicola and her dance partner Katya Jones made Strictly history by becoming the show's first ever same-sex pairing.

Nicola told the BBC: "I wanted a new challenge, something different to do. I'm always challenging myself all the time ... It's been an incredible experience."

2020

2017

Reverend Richard Coles
(MA Theology and Religious Studies 2005)

Richard, a parish priest, journalist and former member of the Communards, partnered with Dianne Buswell in 2017, but was voted off the show in week two.

2016

Naga Munchetty
(English Literature and Language 1997)

Taking to the floor in 2016, TV presenter, newsreader and journalist Naga partnered with Pasha Kovalev, making it to week four before being voted out.

2015

Anita Rani
(Broadcasting 2000)

Anita, an author, TV presenter and BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour presenter, reached the semi-finals paired with Gleb Savchenko in 2015.

Alumni profile: Catherine Noakes

SAGE ADVISER

As a leading expert on the spread and transmission of Covid-19, Prof Cath Noakes OBE has the attention of the highest level of UK government.

Prof Cath Noakes OBE was the main scientific consultant behind the messaging of the Hands Face Space campaign.

> “THERE’S NOTHING LIKE GOING FROM OBSCURITY TO ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS THERE IS.”

In April 2020, Covid-19 had not long pushed the UK into full lockdown when **Prof Cath Noakes** (Mathematical Engineering 1996; PhD Mechanical Engineering 2001) received an email. “It came out of the blue and it was a little unnerving,” she said. The email, from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), requested her expertise on disease transmission to aid NHS and UK government decision-makers during the pandemic.

“While all these people were making sourdough bread, I didn’t have time to bake anything,” she joked. Instead, Cath gathered papers about transmission of the virus and started forming and leading the Environmental Modelling Group (EMG) – a sub-group of SAGE comprising engineers, architects, clinicians, modellers, microbiologists, behavioural scientists and public health specialists.

Cath was recruited by SAGE for her expertise in using physics and computer simulations to model how pathogens spread in buildings. As Professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings in the School of Civil Engineering and Deputy Director of the Leeds Institute for Fluid Dynamics, Cath’s research includes investigating how touching contaminated surfaces can spread infections and how airborne diseases can be curtailed using air flow and ventilation.

“Until the start of the pandemic it was quite a niche area with a lot more focus on the energy consumption of a building,” she explained. “There’s nothing like going from obscurity to one of the most important topics there is.”

Central to her work is fluid dynamics – essentially how fluids such as liquids and air move. “How an aerosol is created in the respiratory system, what happens when someone breathes out, where the aerosol goes, how ventilation carries it to be inhaled by somebody else – that’s all fluid dynamics,” said Cath.

Along with other research, Cath leads a project called Hospital Environment Control, Optimisation and Infection Risk Assessment (HECOIRA), which is developing computational models to predict Covid-19 transmission in healthcare settings. Meanwhile, last July, she joined 35 international collaborators to pen an open letter, signed by 239 scientists worldwide, which urged decision-makers to recognise the potential for the airborne spread of Covid-19.

Through the EMG (whose membership includes another Leeds professor, Mark Wilcox) Cath has shaped public policy by delivering guidance to the NHS and the government. The group’s counsel has underpinned decisions on social distancing, reopening after lockdown and the assessment of risks for activities as diverse as dentistry, circuses, saunas and singing in groups. Cath was the main scientific consultant behind the messaging of the Hands Face Space campaign in September 2020, which was designed to promote awareness of how to reduce the virus’s spread.

Her contributions have not gone unnoticed. In August, she was recognised by The Royal Academy of Engineering with a President’s Special Award for Pandemic Service. Then, a month later, Cath received another unexpected email.

“My husband had previously said, ‘Oh, somebody will probably give you an OBE at some point’, and then I opened this email and saw I had been given one in the Queen’s Birthday Honours for ‘services to the Covid-19 response’,” Cath recalled. “It was an odd feeling because we were still in the middle of it all. It was nice to be recognised but it should be a shared award, really, for all the people at Leeds and all the others on SAGE who have worked very, very hard.”

Despite vaccines now in circulation, Cath’s advisory role will continue. “I think there’s now much more of an awareness that the built environment has big implications for how disease transmits, and that’s in all buildings – offices, schools and homes,” she said. Cath sees an imperative for further research into this link. “We still need to understand how much it matters but there’s nothing like a crisis to bring scientists together.”

Others at Leeds tackling Covid-19

Medicine: Prof Mark Wilcox co-chairs the Hospital Onset Covid-19 Working Group and also the UK Technical Validation Group, which is responsible for determining the accuracy of Covid-19 tests. He joins Cath Noakes on the Environmental Modelling Group.

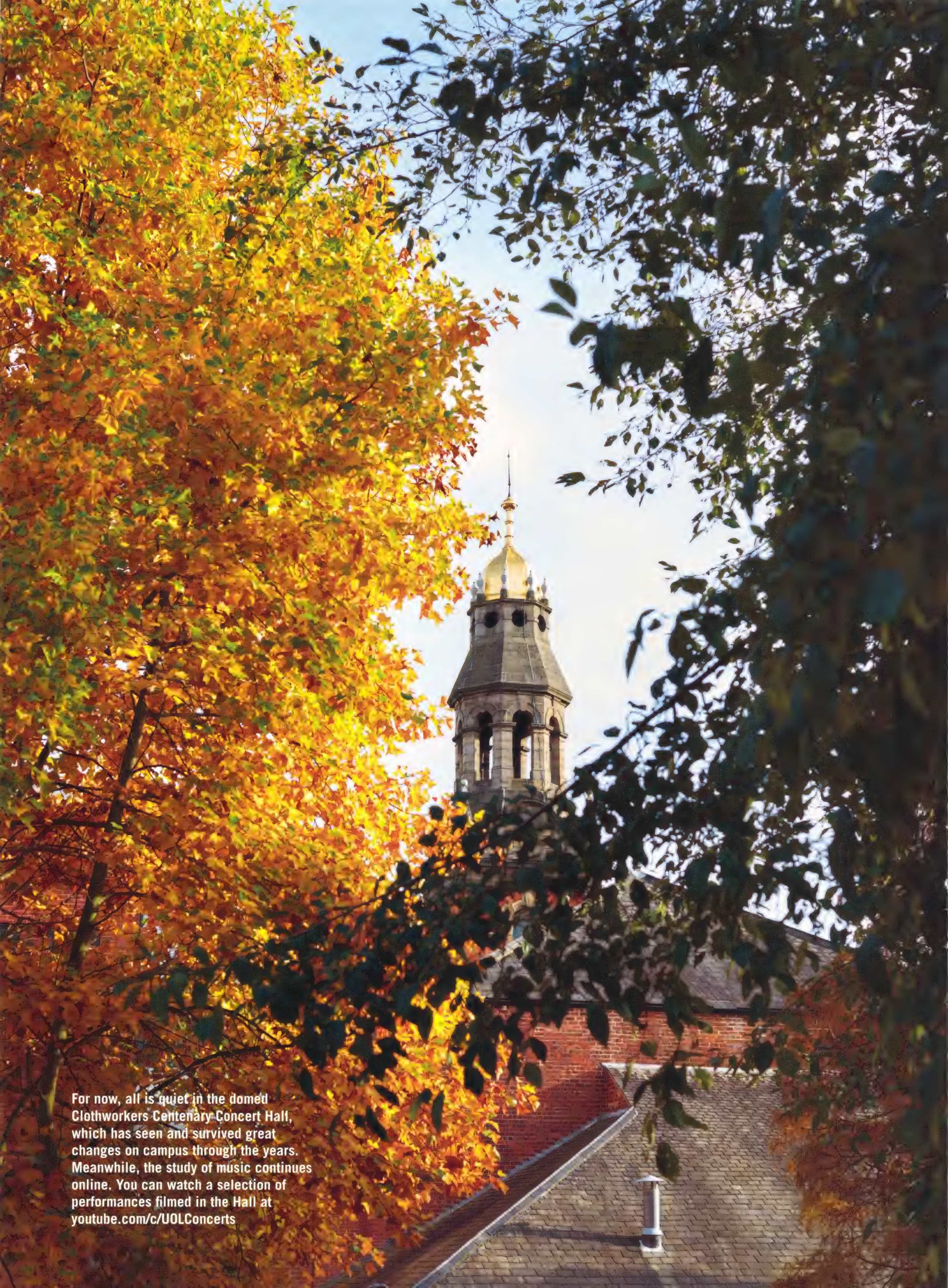
Civil Engineering: Prof Barbara Evans (Civil Engineering 1987) is on an international team reviewing the links between Covid-19 and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). She has been rolling out a training programme for public health staff with the government of India.

Earth and Environment: Prof Dave Hodgeson and **Dr Gareth Keevil** (PhD Earth and Environment 2005) used thermal imaging to study the air flow of people breathing through different face masks and air movements produced by singing or playing musical instruments.

Law: Prof Iyola Solanke is a member of the Independent Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours, which advises SAGE on behavioural science aimed at anticipating and helping people adhere to interventions.

Mechanical Engineering: Prof Nikil Kapur (PhD Mechanical Engineering 1999) and **Dr Pete Culmer** (MEng Mechatronics 2002; PhD Mechanical Engineering 2007) converted unused sleep apnoea machines into ventilators.

Words
James Urquhart
(History & Philosophy of Science and Biology 2003) is a science journalist and filmmaker.



For now, all is quiet in the domed Clothworkers Centenary Concert Hall, which has seen and survived great changes on campus through the years. Meanwhile, the study of music continues online. You can watch a selection of performances filmed in the Hall at youtube.com/c/UOLConcerts

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Alumni news

Leeds has 270,000 alumni around the world. This is what some of you are up to.

RAY OF HOPE

***Ray Pope** (Popular and World Musics 2007) is Head of Creative Talent Acquisition at Universal Music UK and its subsidiaries.*

As a member of the Creative Differences project for the creative industries, Ray explored the experiences of people with specific facets of neurodiversity such as autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia and Tourette syndrome. They produced a guide that gives first-person insight into ways to increase recruitment and career development for people who think differently. Ray sits on the UK Music Diversity Taskforce, which works with the music business, government and other stakeholders to boost inclusion and diversity across the industry. She is a classically trained musician and lover of soul music, R&B and gospel.

Ray Pope, Creative Acquisition Manager at Universal Music

ACTION MAN

He's flown British fighter jets, looked for dinosaurs using Nasa technology, ascended various peaks across five continents and earned a world record by circumnavigating the globe in a London taxi. This year, **Matt Prior** (Aviation Technology with Pilot Studies 2006) is enjoying being a new father, advising tech startups, flying commercially and running expedition companies AdventureX and 101 Meridian. Matt lives in Hong Kong and is a former Director of the Hong Kong chapter of the Explorers Club.

Matt Prior advises tech startups and leads expeditions.

BEST CENTRAL BANKER

Caroline Abel (Economic Studies 1999) won an 'Oscar of the African banking community' for her work as Governor of the Central Bank of Seychelles. The African Banker Awards named her central bank governor of the year. Since 2012 Caroline has guided the Seychellois economy, which has tourism as 30 per cent of its gross domestic product. The committee praised Caroline for developing transparency and guidance to markets, supporting digitisation and collaborating across ministries to provide stability for her country's economy.

Caroline Abel won a 2020 African Banker Award.

Junlong Shang researches fractures in rocks.

ROCK OF AGES

The International Society for Rock Mechanics gave **Dr Junlong Shang** (PhD Earth and Environment 2016) the prestigious 2020 Rocha Medal for his PhD research, which has implications in the mining and nuclear waste industries. The society rewarded Junlong's work looking at how, over millions of years, tiny fractures can develop into fully open fractures as rock weathers. He determined the tensile strength of the fractures at stages in the process. Junlong's study will support geotechnical investigations for slope stability. He is now Lecturer in Engineering Geology and Geotechnics at the University of Glasgow.

ALL DRESSED UP, NOWHERE TO GO

To those in the know, **Olivia von Halle**'s (Textile and Fashion Management 2007) take on luxury loungewear has made her the doyenne of decadent dressing. Her directional approach to down-dressing translates into luxurious silks, rich screen-printing and glamour. Olivia puts sustainable development at the heart of her business strategy and aims to positively impact both people and planet. Her brand is sold in such stores as Harrods, Browns Fashion and net-a-porter.com. Bella Hadid, Selena Gomez, Rihanna and Oprah Winfrey are among Olivia von Halle clientele. "I was a nightmare student and changed degrees every year until a kind Spanish professor pointed me towards the fashion department," said Olivia. "I have a lot to thank him for!"

Olivia von Halle, the woman behind the fashion brand

Spider-Man's parents, Nikki and Dominic Holland, met at Leeds.

ECLIPSED BY THE SON

Like many couples who met at Leeds, **Dominic and Nikki Holland** (both Textile Management 1988) married and raised a family. Dominic became an award winning comedian and author while Nikki became a successful photographer. As Dominic describes in his book Eclipsed, their achievements suddenly paled when their eldest son, actor Tom Holland, became Spider-Man. Together the family runs a charity called The Brothers Trust. Dominic's latest book, Takes on Life, was published in December.

CHILLEST GRADUATE

Early January brought the voice of **Sian Eleri** (Broadcast Journalism 2017) across UK airwaves when she took over the Chillest Show on BBC Radio 1. Sian previously presented on BBC Radio Cymru after honing her skills at Leeds Student Radio, where her soothing music selection was similar to what she now plays in her new Sunday night slot.

Sunday night radio DJ Sian Eleri

Leeds United fan Rich Williams

UNITED FAN

Virgin radio presenter **Rich Williams** (Politics 2004) welled up that night in Leeds last July. He'd just watched his team reach the Premier League after waiting 16 long years. Rich, a presenter for Leeds United TV and former pitch announcer for the club, has subsequently spoken about Leeds United in the international press. He has hosted sports matches in stadiums across Europe for tournaments including the Rugby World Cup, the Cricket World Cup and the Champions League.

BUSY YEAR FOR INSURER

2020 was a busy year for **Amanda Blanc** (MBA 1999). In July, she became Group CEO at Aviva, the international savings, retirement and insurance company. She also advised on trade negotiations as a member of the UK's Financial Services Trade Advisory Group and led a government commissioned review into flood insurance in Doncaster following the flooding of November 2019. Through all this work, she's maintained her ongoing role as Independent Chair of the Welsh Professional Rugby Board.

Top insurer Amanda Blanc has an MBA from Leeds

RAISING AWARENESS

Jonta Saragih (MA Global Development and Gender 2017) is gradually changing the narrative of LGBTIQ people in Indonesia. As Program Manager for Rights, Inclusion and Diversity at a human rights organisation, Jonta raises awareness of LGBTIQ issues with religious leaders and politicians. He has opened discussion about diversity with more than 500 religious leaders and 1,000 theological students. Jonta has been interviewed by a range of media outlets and has sensitised many Indonesian journalists to challenges faced by people in this community. His work also involves creating safe spaces for dialogue on gender and sexuality and strengthening the resilience of LGBTIQ people in Indonesia.

Jonta Saragih at the UN headquarters after a dialogue with UN LGBTIQ core group country members

IDENTITY DRAMA

Growing up between Leeds and Zimbabwe, playwright and poet ***Zodwa Nyoni*** *(MA Writing for Performance and Publication 2013) felt like an outsider in both cultures.*

Now, Zodwa explores themes of identity, home and migration in her writing. Critics praised Zodwa's monologue Nine Lives, recently performed at London's Bridge Theatre, for bringing compassion and humour to a story about a man trying to build a new life in Leeds after escaping homophobia in Zimbabwe.

Zodwa came to Leeds as a child when her father, **Dr Abraham Nyoni** (Textiles Science and Engineering 1995; PhD Design 2004), studied at the University. She has been Writer in Residence at the Leeds Playhouse and has written plays for the Young Vic, BBC Radio 3 and Hull City of Culture. She also dedicates time to helping new writers find their voice in the arts.

Zodwa is currently commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre and Kiln Theatre and is developing films with BBC Films and the BFI.

Poet and playwright Zodwa Nyoni

THE ULTIMATE INFLUENCER

For 15 years, he has influenced global politicians and spoken out about the wellbeing of people worldwide. This summer, **Angel Gurría** (MA Development Economics 1974; Hon LLD 2010) will step down as Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD brings governments together to address the world's biggest problems and supplies them with economic expertise, data and analysis. While leading the OECD, Angel has supported a growing need for internationally comparable data on tax evasion, climate change and artificial intelligence.

Angel Gurría, a leader in global economic development

Fighting the pandemic

A small sample of Leeds alumni who have been helping others during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The junior doctor

For many athletes, the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics meant putting their dreams of sporting success on hold. But for **Dr Kim Daybell** (Medicine 2018) it meant a return to helping those who needed him most. Kim, a junior doctor in North London, has treated Covid-19 patients through the pandemic. Kim, a two-time Paralympian, is a member of Team GB's Paralympic table tennis squad.

Kim Daybell swapped the Paralympics for medicine.

The hospital leader

As Chief Executive of Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, **Dame Jackie Daniel** (MA Healthcare 1995) has led more than 14,000 staff and managed strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Trust treated the UK's first patients and has been at the forefront of the response to the crisis.

Hospital CEO Dame Jackie Daniel

The PPE supplier

Amid the global surge in demand for personal protective equipment, **Ravi Toor** (Environment & Business 2017) helped to supply frontline workers with protective face shields. His company, Filamentive, founded by Ravi while studying at Leeds, supplied essential filament to shield makers at cost. Thousands of face shields have been produced and donated to hospitals, GPs, pharmacies, paramedics and social care practices.

Ravi Toor helped to supply face shields.

The fundraiser

Since starting her Run for Heroes fundraising campaign in March 2020, **Olivia Strong MBE** (Politics and Sociology 2015) has helped to raise more than £7 million for NHS Charities Together, which supports the wellbeing of NHS staff fighting Covid-19. Olivia's idea – run five kilometres, donate £5 and nominate five others to do the same – inspired over 1.5 million participants.

Run for Heroes founder Olivia Strong

The paramedic

In Greater Manchester, paramedic **Emily Morris** (Psychology 2015) has been treating patients during the crisis. "It has been an extremely challenging time to be part of a frontline service," she said. "I love my job, and no matter what I face each day I feel proud to be able to help people in their hour of need."

Emily Morris on paramedic duty

BRIEFS

Dr Mark Wigglesworth (PhD Biochemistry & Microbiology 2001) is Site Director at the Alderley Park Lighthouse Lab in Cheshire, which has processed more than 1 million Covid-19 test samples.

With the charity Sewa International in Houston, Texas, **Dr Madan Luthra** (PhD Biochemistry 1972) has been connecting plasma donors to Covid-19 patients, delivering groceries and medical supplies, aiding stranded international students, supporting grieving families and helping to arrange tests.

By charting and publishing the UK growth rate of Covid-19, daily social media posts by **Peng Wu** (Law 2020) went viral as he helped thousands understand the spread of the disease.

Dr Clive Dix (Pharmacology 1976, PhD 1982) was Deputy Chair and is now Interim Chair of the UK government's Vaccine Taskforce, set up to drive forward the development and production of a Covid-19 vaccine as quickly as possible.

In Oregon, US, **Amir Kanji** (Economics and Accounting 1965) is CEO at Biomed Diagnostic where they have been producing the Virus Transport Mechanism – a device for transporting test specimens for analysis.

Chandra Datta (MSc Biosciences 2010), a quality assurance manager at the University of Oxford Jenner Institute, played a key role in manufacturing a vaccine.

Okediachi Idaboh (MA Public Health 2014) is an assistant infection prevention and control lead at the Federal Medical Centre Asaba, a treatment centre for Covid-19 in Delta State, Nigeria.

BBC Medical Editor **Fergus Walsh** (English 1983) has kept television viewers up to date about the pandemic.

Patrick Grant (Materials 1994) switched production at his Cookson and Clegg clothing factory to make scrubs for NHS staff.

Through the charity HandsOn Hong Kong, **Tommy McColl** (Civil Engineering 1995) makes home deliveries to isolated older people in Chai Wan.

Vicky Salomon (Arts Management 2006) has brought 73,000 parents together through the pandemic with her activity sharing platform Housebound with Kids.

Read more alumni news at
alumni.leeds.ac.uk

Supporter news

The Leeds student experience is even more special thanks to the support of our alumni. Here are some ways Leeds alumni have had an impact by giving time, expertise or funding.

Student mentee Sara Felberg with mentor Alison Lowe (History 1990; MA Medieval Studies 1993), Chief Executive of the mental health charity Touchstone

VOLUNTEERS INSPIRE STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

Over the past year, more than 1,200 alumni have volunteered their time to support the University's mission.

Alumni volunteers represent Leeds at recruitment fairs around the world, playing an important role in inspiring prospective students to come to Leeds. For the past three years, **Andrew Kasanga** (MSc Environmental Engineering and Project Management 2016) has volunteered at the British Council Study UK Fair in Ghana: "I know from my own time in Leeds that the University has superb opportunities for its students," said Andrew. "I am delighted to share my experiences with potential students."

Individual mentoring helps students develop attributes that will be critical to their future career. Our Alumni Leadership Mentoring Programme helps build students' leadership, networking and communication skills. Through one-to-one meetings – held online during the Covid-19 pandemic – mentors help students to recognise their strengths and address their weaknesses as they prepare for their working lives.

Established professionals are also helping recent graduates by sharing contacts and creating personal development opportunities, such as Insight Days, which give small groups of students the opportunity to visit an alum's workplace to gain first-hand experience of what working there would be like. In addition, workshops enable recent graduates to meet alumni from their chosen field of employment and develop their network with others in the sector.

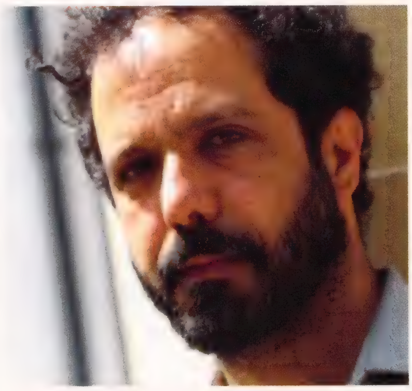
For more about our volunteering programmes visit **alumni.leeds.ac.uk/volunteering**

SPORTING CULTURE

A poem written by Cultural Fellow Zaffar Kunial on his first day in the University has been published in the cricketing almanack Wisden. Recalling the deeds of legends such as Grace, Bradman and Richards, Oval Time is one of several of Zaffar's works that celebrate his passion for the game.

Cultural Fellowships, funded by our donors, enable talented artists from a range of disciplines to develop their craft at Leeds. During his Fellowship, Zaffar has also created a series of poems about the Brontë sisters, works about the Yorkshire countryside and a poem inspired by self-isolation.

Read Oval Time at **bit.ly/UOLscholars**



SCHOLARSHIPS CHANGE LIVES

Over the past ten years, your gifts have provided scholarships for more than 1,400 students to study for their undergraduate degrees at Leeds. This incredible generosity is changing lives for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in Britain.

To read about their stories, visit **bit.ly/UOLscholars**

HELPING STUDENTS TO FACE A CRISIS

Launched last spring, our 2020 Student Support Fund is helping students who were hit financially by the Covid-19 pandemic. From those who were left desperately short of funds when their term-time employment ended to others who were stranded abroad, hundreds of students have benefited from grants to address the crisis in their lives.

This was possible thanks to the incredible generosity of almost 500 alumni and other supporters, whose gifts helped us to reach our target of £150,000 in a matter of weeks.

For more about the Student Support Fund
visit **bit.ly/SSFLeeds**

HELPING STUDENTS TO MEET THEIR CHALLENGES

Run jointly by our Counselling and Wellbeing and Sport and Physical Activity services, our Lifestyle and Wellbeing Programme offers a range of interventions for students facing issues such as anxiety, low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Through concentrating on physical wellbeing, self-care, nutrition, exercise and sleep, the programme is proven to enhance mood, reduce isolation and, for many students, improve academic performance.

Support from the Footsteps Fund enabled 81 students to feel the benefit of this innovative programme during the past year.

GRANT TAKES STUDENTS UNDERGROUND

Each year, the Footsteps Fund supports Leeds societies to enhance their activities and improve their service to students. Among last year's grants was a gift to the Caving Society to enable more adventurous students to take part in expeditions underground, such as at the spectacular Gaping Gill in the Yorkshire Dales.

The cost of equipment has long been a barrier to new members joining the society. The purchase of safety harnesses, ropes, helmets and oversuits has helped make these experiences accessible to students from all backgrounds.

For more about the Footsteps Fund
visit **bit.ly/footstepsleeds**

SCHOLARSHIP REKINDLES A LOVE FOR THE PAST

Almost a decade after graduating, Myles Harman is back at university studying for a Masters degree in classics with the support of a Footsteps Fund scholarship.

It fulfils a long-held ambition: "Although I never stopped being interested in history and classics, I thought that the financial barriers and tuition fees would preclude me from going any further," said Myles, who hopes to progress to a PhD. "For years I gave up on the idea of academia, but now I am getting to do what I love."

A SPECIAL NEW LOOK

Renowned antique dealer John Victor Bedford bequeathed his collection of rare books, manuscripts and objects to the University. Now a financial gift from his Trustees is enabling us to make the most of this remarkable archive. The John Evan Bedford Library of Furniture History is a unique collection covering all aspects of the English home – interiors, furnishings, drapery, lighting, plasterwork, architecture and gardens – from the 17th century onwards.

A gift from the John Victor Bedford Will Trust is enabling us to remodel and expand the Special Collections area of the Brotherton Library, creating flexible new areas for teaching and research, and allowing more items from our collections to be placed on display.

To learn more about the impact of legacies at the University of Leeds visit **bit.ly/UOLlegacies**

Department news

Research in our faculties, schools and institutes is increasing our understanding of the world. Here's some of the most recent activity going on at Leeds.

Ice loss meets worst scenario

Centre for Polar Observation and Modelling

Melting ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica have raised the global sea level by 1.8cm since the 1990s – and are matching worst-case climate-warming scenarios predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

According to a study led by research fellow Dr Tom Slater in collaboration with colleagues in Denmark, if these rates continue, the melting ice sheets are expected to raise sea levels by a further 17cm by the end of the century, exposing millions more people to annual coastal flooding.

"Although we anticipated the ice sheets would lose increasing amounts of ice in response to the warming of the oceans and atmosphere, the rate at which they are melting has accelerated faster than we could have imagined," said Tom.

"The melting is overtaking the climate models we use to guide us, and we are in danger of being unprepared for the risks posed by sea level rise."

Using vibration to detect impurities

Chemical and Process Engineering

Working with colleagues from the Sorbonne, Leeds scientists located a single silicon atom in a graphene crystal using an electron microscope and then observed its vibrations within the crystal.

The energy of the microscope beam makes atoms vibrate, creating a unique vibrational fingerprint. Impurities can change that fingerprint, but advanced techniques are needed to detect these subtle changes.

Quentin Ramasse, Professor of Advanced Electron Microscopy, explained: "We now have evidence that a single 'foreign' atom in a solid can change its vibrational property. We have shown for the first time that you can record that defect signature with atomic precision."

Written in the stars

Physics and Astronomy

More than 2,000 new protostars have been identified in our galaxy thanks to PhD researcher Miguel Vioque and his team. They used artificial intelligence to sift through vast quantities of data collected by the Gaia space telescope on its mission to map the Milky Way, identifying 2,226 new, large, forming stars. Previously, only 100 examples of this type of star had been catalogued. Analysis of the new stars revealed in Miguel's research will help inform understanding of massive star formation and the galaxy's origins.

New hope for Parkinson's therapies

Biology

The discovery of a master control region for a protein linked to Parkinson's disease could provide hope of new therapies.

Associate Professor David Brockwell and Sheena Radford, Astbury Professor of Biophysics, led research by their team in the Astbury Centre for Structural Molecular Biology on the protein alpha-synuclein, which is involved in Parkinson's disease. Alpha-synuclein is found in healthy cells within the nervous system. Problems occur when the protein aggregates, or clumps together, disrupting normal cell function. NAC, an area of the protein particularly prone to aggregation, was previously thought to be key to understanding the disease, yet this new research has discovered two additional regions outside of NAC that control its aggregation. The identification of these sites provides a new target for therapies that could delay or even prevent the progression of Parkinson's disease, which affects more than 10 million people worldwide.

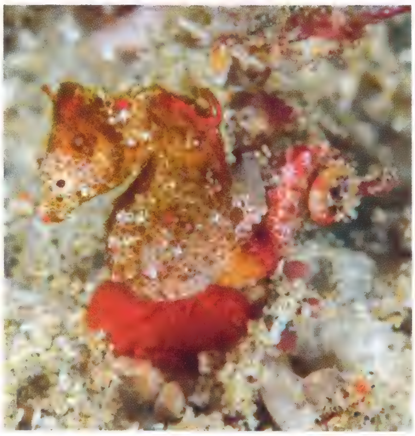
Prof Kevin Theakston

When a leader falls ill

Politics and International Studies

Boris Johnson's positive Covid-19 test turned thoughts to times when previous British prime ministers fell ill. Kevin Theakston, Professor of British Government, explored how leaders such as Anthony Eden and Margaret Thatcher led the nation while unwell.

Kevin explained in Time magazine that Winston Churchill suffered a stroke in 1953, a fact kept secret from the nation: "His aides sent out memos in the name of the Prime Minister, when perhaps Churchill hadn't even seen the text. They knew his thinking pretty well."



Credit: © Richard Smith – OceanRealmImages.com

Africa's first pygmy seahorse

Biology

An international research team has discovered a new pygmy seahorse species in Sodwana Bay in South Africa, the first of its kind found in African waters. At around 2.7cm, the seahorse is not much bigger than a thumbnail and its closest known relatives live over 8,000km away in Southeast Asia. Research fellow Dr Maarten De Brauwer said: "Being a part of the team that discovered this amazing creature is definitely a career highlight."

Making concrete greener

Civil Engineering

Susan Bernal Lopez, Professor in Structural Materials, received the Rosenhain Medal from the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining for her research into new cements and concretes. Concrete is one of the world's most widely used materials and contributes to around 8 per cent of global CO_2 emissions. Susan and her team aim to develop sustainable alternatives produced from wastes or by-products from industrial, mining and agricultural processes.

Show must go online

Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

With final year shows cancelled in 2020, it could have been a disappointing end to months of preparation for students from the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies. Instead, students across the school pulled together to adapt their plans to the digital sphere. From creating a virtual gallery, to adapting a live performance to an audio play, they demonstrated that even in difficult circumstances their show could go on.

Find out more:
simmerleeds.com
stage.leeds.ac.uk/maleficarum

New use for failed drug

Leeds Institute of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Medicine

Drugs developed to treat Alzheimer's disease could be repurposed to prevent – or even reverse – damage done to the blood vessels of people who are obese or have type 2 diabetes.

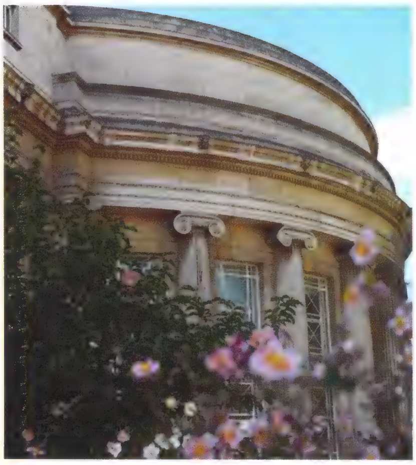
People living with conditions including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol have a stiffening of their blood vessels, which puts them at increased risk of heart attack or stroke. Scientists at Leeds and the University of Dundee found that changes to the blood vessels can be triggered by the over-production of an enzyme called BACE1, which in turn creates the protein beta amyloid. Stopping the actions of BACE1 can restore blood vessel health, according to findings published in The Journal of Clinical Investigation.

Drug companies have developed BACE1 inhibitors but, so far, they have proved ineffective in tackling Alzheimer's disease. It is now hoped that they can be repurposed to tackle stiffening blood vessels.

Crime of the times

Law

A grant from UK Research and Innovation is allowing Leeds researchers to examine the changing face of crime throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Closures to shops and people spending more time at home led to decreases in shoplifting and burglary, but increases in domestic abuse and online crime. Researchers are examining the impact of crime and identifying areas for crime prevention as the world adapts to the changes caused by the pandemic.



Budding research

Biological Sciences

Research to better understand when and why plants stop flowering could have major implications for crop yields and food production.

Led by Leeds academic fellow Dr Tom Bennett, collaborative research with the University of Nottingham examined auxin production in fertilised fruits to identify the role it plays in blocking the growth of new flowers. This understanding could provide insight into better commercial management of plant flowering, which will help to improve crop yields.

Working for the future

Leeds University Business School

Opened in January 2020, the Digital Futures at Work Research Centre provides a base for exploring how new technologies could impact the future of work. Particularly relevant after the sudden global shift to remote working, the Centre brings together researchers and policymakers to examine the evolving nature of work. By exploring the impact of technology on employers, employees, jobseekers and governments, the researchers will help inform global policies and identify future essential skills.

Spread dust to capture carbon

Global Food and Environment Institute

A new study, widely reported in the press, shows how spreading volcanic rock dust boosts a soil's ability to draw carbon from the air. Adding crushed basalt to farmland could remove more CO_2 than the total global emissions from aviation and shipping.

"In many agricultural regions, crushed rock is routinely used to improve soil pH," said Steve Banwart, Professor of Integrated Soil, Agriculture and Water Research. "Adapting this to use basalt dust could capture vast amounts of CO_2."

Online congress

History

The International Medieval Congress, held annually at Leeds, is the biggest academic event of its kind in Europe. Last year the organisers turned to modern technology to bring the medievalists together online.

Hosted over five days by the Institute of Medieval Studies, around 3,000 attendees took part in over 250 academic sessions, as well as fringe events, including networking sessions, book launches, calligraphy demonstrations, manuscript workshops and even a virtual disco. Delegates were delighted by the opportunity for the medievalist community to meet without leaving their homes.

Credit: Mark Bickerdike

Cancer risk written in DNA

Leeds Institute for Data Analytics

Leeds scientists were among a global collaboration that identified 33 new regions of the human genome that influence the risk of developing the skin cancer melanoma.

They compared DNA from 37,000 people with melanoma to that of nearly 400,000 people with no history of the disease. By identifying these regions, and confirming another 21 previously reported regions, they have more than doubled the number of areas of the genome known to be linked to melanoma.

The carbon cycle

Transport Studies

Senior research fellow Dr Ian Philips and his team recommended that governments incentivise electrically assisted bike use to improve mobility in low income and non-urban areas. Replacing 20 per cent of car miles with electronically assisted bike travel could reduce annual carbon emissions by 4 to 8 million tonnes.

3D synthetic tongue

Food Science and Nutrition

Despite the challenges of a complex architecture, researchers have created a synthetic soft surface replica of the human tongue that mimics its topography and wettability – factors that influence how food and saliva interact upon its surface. Researchers used tongue masks obtained from healthy human subjects and digital light processing technology to make a 3D printed tongue mould. This silicone-based tongue surface could help accelerate the development of nutritional, biomedical and clinical products. It is a result of an interdisciplinary collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, which was led by Anwesha Sarkar, Professor of Colloids and Surfaces.

Historic writers' climate insights

English

The climate emergency has spawned a genre of fiction, but David Higgins, Professor of Environmental Humanities, and postdoctoral fellow Dr Tess Somervell have shown how, through the ages, literature has offered a valuable perspective on environmental changes.

Writing in The Conversation, they cite examples such as literature's oldest epic poem, Epic of Gilgamesh (c1800 BC), which tells of a huge flood, that stemmed from a cultural memory of sea level rise after the Ice Age.

Similarly, Byron's Darkness, Percy Shelley's Mont Blanc and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, which were written as global temperatures plummeted after an Indonesian volcanic eruption during 1816, reveal anxieties about our vulnerability to the environment.

The researchers concluded: "Literature reminds us of the need to take responsibility for our own impact on the environment. We may not want to view climate change as divine punishment, but when Milton suggests it was the fall of man that replaced Eden's eternal spring with 'pinching cold and scorching heat', his narrative resonates with our present crisis."

Model tool for investors

Mathematics and LUBS

An innovative new modelling tool, created in partnership with the investment management and stockbroking firm Redmayne Bentley, will help investment managers make decisions on where to invest client money. With input from both the School of Mathematics and Leeds University Business School, the tool breaks down portfolio risks, creating real outputs that can be used to support decisions about asset allocation.

Discover more online at
magazine.alumni.leeds.ac.uk

Campus news

The University continues to work hard to make Leeds the best possible home for study, research and student life.

DEALING WITH CHANGE

Out of uncertainty, stress and demotivation emerged a painting by a young Leeds artist that won The Arts Society's national Isolation Artwork Competition.

Abigail McGourley with her award-winning oil painting

Fine art student Abigail McGourley's self-portrait, Brewing, sees her drinking a cup of tea in the bath: two things she found comforting during the first national lockdown.

The pandemic changed not only the ways the University teaches students like Abigail, but also our approach to the safety and wellbeing of more than 32,000 students and postgraduate researchers. Academic personal tutors and other staff have stayed in touch with students, both digitally and in person. Information points across campus have offered students in-person help with general issues, while online professional counselling and wellbeing appointments have been available for greater needs. Careers fairs also moved online.

University accommodation staff have proven critical at this time of loneliness. Self-isolating students have received emergency food and cleaning supplies – and even bedding for arriving international students – while a contactless laundry service has been available to all.

For spiritual needs, faith leaders have held online services and drop-ins, as well as providing some in-person support. Private prayer locations have remained open.

The University has also launched a Student Ideas Fund, which encourages students to be collaborators in improving the student experience and learning at Leeds.

Meanwhile, LUU has provided practical and financial support. Its support groups, clubs and societies have helped students cope and connect. Fruity nightclub went online to remind students that, even when meeting face to face is more difficult, there are stills ways to have fun and socialise.

The new Esther Simpson Building, part of a plan to transform the western part of campus

Building named after Esther

As a result of a Leeds magazine story, a major new teaching building on Lyddon Terrace will be named after **Esther Simpson** (French and German 1924; Dip Education 1925; Hon LLD 1989). Esther worked tirelessly to save intellectuals fleeing persecution during the Second World War and in the following decades. The Esther Simpson Building, situated near Leeds University Business School and School of Law buildings, is part of a multimillion-pound development of facilities for these disciplines. It will include trading rooms, technology-rich flexible teaching areas and behavioural laboratories.

Read Esther's story at
alumni.leeds.ac.uk/grace-under-pressure

Honours from the Queen

Dame Linda Pollard

Six members of the University community were recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours. OBEs went to Prof Sheena Radford for research in molecular biology, **Prof Cath Noakes** for services to the Covid-19 response and Prof Jason Lowe for services to climate science.

MBEs went to Leeds alumni **Olivia Strong** (Politics and Sociology 2015), the founder of the Run for Heroes campaign, and **Francis Rainsford** (Textile Management 1974), the British Honorary Consul in Peru.

Former University Pro-Chancellor **Dame Linda Pollard** (Honorary LLD 2013), Chair of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, was made a Dame for services to healthcare and the community.

Building for Bragg

There's an enormous change on Woodhouse Lane now that construction of the 15,700 square metre Sir William Henry Bragg Building nears completion. It will house exceptional research labs and other specialised facilities for the School of Computing and the School of Physics and Astronomy. With direct links to the Chemistry and Engineering buildings, the building will form part of our new integrated campus of engineering and physical sciences. The building's name is a fitting tribute to the 1915 Nobel prize-winning Leeds professor, Sir William Henry Bragg. To this day, his fundamental work in X-ray crystallography has sweeping applications – from drug development to astronomy.

A new addition to Woodhouse Lane

Alum's artwork acquired

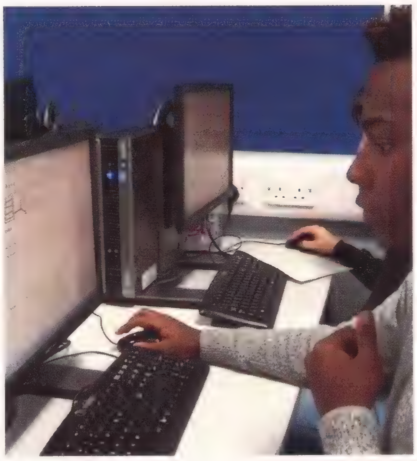
The University art collection has acquired a work by internationally acclaimed conceptual artist **Sutapa Biswas** (Fine Art 1985), the University's first South Asian fine art student. Sutapa worked with images projected onto her own naked body to create the work, called Synapse 1. The resulting hand-printed photographs explore her experiences as an Indian artist in a postcolonial world.

The Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery displays some of the University's art collection.

National Poetry Centre for Leeds

Leeds will become home to a new National Poetry Centre backed by Leeds City Council, the University, and poet laureate and Leeds Professor of Poetry Simon Armitage. The centre, planned to be ready for 2023, will raise the international profile of UK poets and provide a headquarters for collaboration and performance in poetry.

Poet laureate Simon Armitage



Our digital future

Our commitment to becoming a globally leading digital university is reflected in the new role of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Digital Transformation, which Prof Neil Morris is holding on an interim basis.

With a brief covering student education, research and the operations of the University, Neil is leading on work to harness the potential of digital technology to enhance research, learning and educational experiences – and to improve ways of working through digitisation and automation.

For students, this means traditional face-to-face and library learning is increasingly enhanced, although not replaced, by an array of digital resources and online learning. Digital technology offers the advantage of enabling students to interact with learners globally through online learning platforms. It opens opportunities for lifelong and professional education from Leeds for students throughout the world.

We will harness new and emerging technologies for research and education, allowing more people around the globe to access remote study at Leeds – and by doing so, reduce inequality and ensure our education has a still greater impact on society worldwide.

Discover more online at
magazine.alumni.leeds.ac.uk

A moment of quiet reflection in Chancellor's Court

Credit: Marcus Lyon (Politics 1987)

Alumni profile: Gillian Leng (Physiology 1982; Medicine 1987; MD 1994)

GUIDING LIGHT

As Chief Executive of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Prof Gillian Leng has gone from studying medicine at Leeds to leading the provision of guidance for healthcare professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Words
Dr Emma Davies
(MSc Food Science 1996, PhD 2001) is a freelance science writer and editor.

> “THERE WAS A HUGE NEED FOR ADVICE FOR FRONTLINE PRACTITIONERS ON WHAT THEY SHOULD BE DOING TO MANAGE PATIENTS WITH COVID. WE DECIDED THAT WE NEEDED TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY.”

Every year, **Prof Gillian Leng CBE** (Physiology 1982; Medicine 1987; MD 1994) returns to Leeds to give a presentation to students in the lecture theatre where she spent many hours as an undergraduate medic.

As Chief Executive of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), she is keen for young medics to learn how to find and use good data to aid clinical decisions. She was therefore delighted that Leeds was one of the first universities to sign up to the NICE student champion scheme. The scheme improves the routine use of evidence-based information by future health and social care staff by providing students with additional training and support to become Evidence Search Champions.

Her own interest was sparked as an undergraduate in the 1980s. “In those days there were no systematic guidelines, so we learned from a combination of textbooks and from senior staff. There was definitely variation in practice, and I remember thinking, ‘They can’t all be right!’” said Gill.

Gill’s overall memories of Leeds are of “a sense of excitement and freedom, together with lots of opportunity”. The facilities were relatively new and the course was “fantastic”. She will never forget the experience of first dissecting a human cadaver. “There was a sense that we were doing something really exceptional. It was a core part of our learning experience.”

After finishing her house jobs at St James’s University Hospital, Gill moved to Scotland to work as a senior house officer in oncology and in A&E.

She then worked for several years on the epidemiology of vascular disease at the University of Edinburgh, when the Cochrane collaboration (now known as Cochrane) was being established. This international and independent non-profit organisation provides up-to-date, accurate information about the effects of healthcare available worldwide.

“I was able to get involved, not just in the peripheral vascular disease group, but also more broadly in the newly developing wider collaboration,” she said. It was an exciting opportunity, which really cemented her interest in evidence-based medicine.

Gill still dips her toe into research on implementing best practice, through a visiting professorship at King’s College London.

The main role of NICE is to improve health and wellbeing by putting science and evidence at the heart of health and care decision making. NICE produces clinical guidelines for frontline practitioners and provides advice on the cost-effectiveness of new drugs and other technologies. When Gill joined in 2001, her first task was to establish the new clinical guidelines programme, based in six royal colleges.

There are now more than 400 guidelines providing best-practice advice on the care for people with specific conditions. “The work we’ve done really does now underpin most clinical practice,” she said, although she is keen to point out that the guidelines are not rigid rules.

Gill was also responsible for setting up the NHS Evidence web portal, recently rebranded as NICE Evidence, which is widely used and trusted by practitioners. She established a NICE accreditation programme and the development of quality standards, which set out priority areas for improvement in health, public health and social care.

As CEO, she leads a team that is currently refining a five-year strategic plan. “NICE is a world-leading organisation with an internationally respected brand,” said Gill. “However, after 21 years, some things need to change.” One goal is to make guidelines “dynamic and living” so that they are always up to date. Another is to find fresh ways to assess new medical technology and to make better use of real-world data.

Gill took up her role as Chief Executive on 1 April 2020 – during the UK’s first national lockdown. When the pandemic hit, NICE changed its standard approach to produce rapid Covid-19 guidelines, commissioned by NHS England. “There was a huge need for advice for frontline practitioners on what they should be doing to manage patients with Covid,” said Gill. “We decided that we needed to do things differently, to be able to respond to the urgent need for guidance.”

There wasn’t time to appoint the usual formal committees so NICE rapidly established expert panels. And rather than the usual six-week consultations, they allowed a three-hour comment window.

“People were amazing,” said Gill. “We would get as many comments in that three-hour window as we would normally have received in a longer consultation period.”

NICE has also worked with partners to assess potential Covid-19 treatments, including existing drugs such as dexamethasone, by collating crucial evidence.

“We really took advantage of our international networks, so guideline developers, the Cochrane collaboration and other organisations have come together to share and pool recommendations and evidence, which has been brilliant,” said Gill.

The Covid-19 guidelines are regularly updated as new medical information emerges. “Developing them has been a real learning experience, illustrating how living, dynamic guidelines can work,” she said. “This is a model we want to adopt more widely for the future, which we are building into a new five-year strategic plan to be launched in April. This will reset and refresh NICE’s approach, enabling us to develop useful and useable guidelines in priority areas.”

REBOOT YOUR DIGITAL WELLBEING

Is it time to rethink your digital life?
Dr Bridgette Bewick gives five tips to avoid slipping into unhealthy habits.

"The digital world is pervasive," said Dr Bridgette Bewick, Associate Professor in Psychological Health and Wellbeing in the School of Medicine, "but most of us haven't been trained how to manage the digital environment.

"Digital wellbeing is about finding ways to integrate digital components into our lives in a way that supports mental health and wellbeing and doesn't detract from it."

Monitor your use

It's easy to get hooked because devices are built using persuasive technology. "We tend to think what we're doing is normal because our reference group, friends and family, are similar to us," Bridgette said. "Step back, ask yourself: 'why am I using the digital environment? Is it helping or hindering me?'

"Behavioural research shows that monitoring is an important first step in change, so considering when and why we are online is a good place to start."

Make it genuine

As social beings, humans need meaningful connections and relationships. This becomes trickier online. "Non-verbal cues are an important part of relationships. They're missing in video calls and SMS, so a day of online meetings doesn't necessarily create meaningful connections."

During social distancing, as technology fills the void of face-to-face interaction, it's important to make it meaningful. "If group quizzes aren't your thing, avoid them. We need authentic conversations with people we share common ground with."

Focus

Multitasking is exhausting for our brains, but it's hard to avoid with multiple devices begging for our attention. Mindfulness and attention exercises help keep us in the present. "Think of your brain like a muscle. The more you train it, the easier it'll be to focus without interruption.

"Attention training alters the structure of the brain. With practice you'll find it easier to stay engaged without the urge to check that news feed."

Recharge

What's the last thing you do at night? Many of us check our phones. "Sleep is crucial for physical and mental health. Physiologically, the light on devices interrupts our ability to go into deep sleep. Scanning for updates keeps our minds switched on.

"We need to create boundaries so we're not 24/7 on call and we can recharge." Try setting a cut-off time. Put your phone on aeroplane mode or in a different room.

Get moving

Technology is changing the way we use our bodies. "We're putting our bodies into positions they aren't designed to be in for long periods. Your neck might ache if you're constantly looking down at your phone, for example.

"Taking breaks from the screen and taking in natural light and fresh air is important for mental and physical health – especially when home working might mean we're moving less. Digital technology can help motivate us with wellbeing apps and fitness trackers."

BRIGHTER FUTURES BOLDER AMBITIONS BIGGER DREAMS

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Open the camera or QR scanner app on your smartphone or tablet and hold your camera over the QR code above. The phone should automatically scan the code. On some devices you may have to press a button to snap a picture. Your smartphone will read the QR code and navigate you to the Leeds alumni website. You will then be able to update your details and communications preferences on our website.